Still Scary after All These Years: Gothic Tropes and Theatricality in *The Woman in Black*

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Abstract
Stephen Mallatratt's play, *The Woman in Black*, a Gothic thriller adapted from Susan Hill's popular book, has the distinction of being the second-longest-running, non-musical production on London's West End where it opened in 1989. Described as 'spine-chilling', 'nerve-shredding', and 'terrifying'[1] it is an effective piece of theatre that has played to over seven million people to date; yet, *The Woman in Black* has received little attention from theatre theorists or historians. Theatre scholars have yet to look at the production for what it can reveal about how a simple, bare-bones theatre piece can resonate with audiences. *The Woman in Black* does not create its theatrical magic with dazzling spectacle; instead, it relies on many long-standing, conventional theatrical elements; and the story, as laid out in the novel, uses many familiar Gothic tropes to create suspense and tension. This chapter investigates how the Gothic tropes of Susan Hill's novel have been employed to create the effective and frightening stage play, and how the production's theatrical elements (particularly lighting and sound) support and enhance the formal structures designed to induce tension in an audience. The chapter also explores the way in which the novel builds tension through intertextual references and by playing upon Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. *The Woman in Black* is a ghost story that presents an encounter with 'death infecting life.'[2] It is an effective Gothic thriller, and the theatrical production based on the book stands as a model of how to garner popular acclaim through the effective use of basic storytelling techniques and simple theatre technologies.

Key Words: Gothic, *The Woman in Black*, Stephen Mallatratt, Susan Hill, abject, ghost, theatre, lighting, sound, adaptation.

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Stephen Mallatratt's play, *The Woman in Black*, a Gothic thriller adapted from Susan Hill's popular book, has the distinction of being the second-longest-running play on London's West End.[3] A two-actor tour de force, *The Woman in Black* was originally commissioned as a low-budget Christmas season filler for The Stephen Joseph Theatre, in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, England, where it premiered on December 12, 1987.[4] *The Woman in Black* arrived on London's West End in January 1989, opening at the Lyric Hammersmith before transferring to The Strand and The Playhouse Theatre. On June 7, 1989 it moved to the Fortune Theatre where it has continued to thrill audiences ever since.

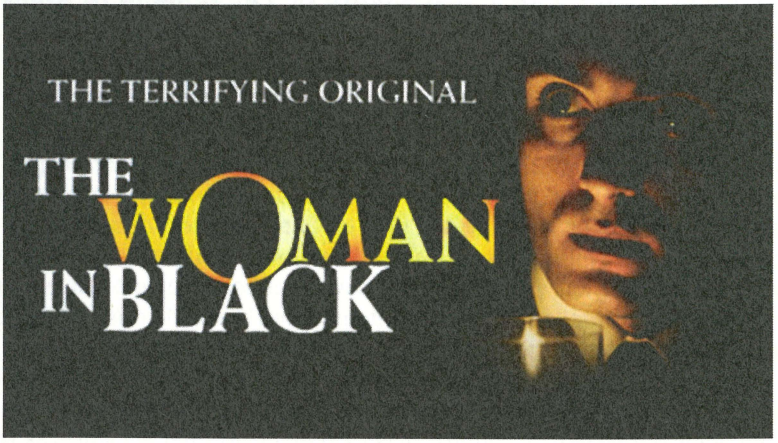

Image 1: Advert. © 2012. Photo courtesy of PW Productions

Described as 'spine-chilling', 'nerve-shredding', and 'terrifying'[5] it is an effective piece of theatre that has played to over seven million people to date; yet, *The Woman in Black* has received little attention from theatre theorists or historians due to an historical bias among intellectuals that has tended to denigrate the study of popular, commercially-successful entertainments. While this bias has been slowly dissipating throughout the last two decades as academics increasingly acknowledge the value in studying mass entertainments, the legacy of ignoring popular theatre has resulted in some very influential and longstanding productions being overlooked. As Alan Woods notes in his article 'Emphasizing the Avant-Garde,' the history of twentieth-century theatre has most often been recorded as 'a series of avant-garde movements,'[6] thus causing theatre historians and theorists to ignore the more conventional and popular forms of theatre and to explore instead the new (and often unusual) manifestations of the art form. Therefore, although *The Woman in Black* has run continuously on the West End throughout the past two decades, little has been written about it within scholarly literature. It does not even receive a mention in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*[7] or in *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics*,[8] nor does it appear in Theodore Shank's volume devoted to *Contemporary British Theatre*.[9] Thus, in spite of its longstanding status, theatre scholars have yet to look at *The Woman in Black* for what it can reveal about how a simple, bare-bones theatre piece can resonate with audiences, and about how we, as theatre artists, can look to it as an example of a production that has been able to garner popular appeal through the effective use of basic storytelling techniques and simple, theatrical tricks that do not require expensive theatre technologies. *The Woman in Black* does not create its theatrical magic with dazzling spectacle or

realistic sets and costumes; instead, it calls upon audience members to use their imaginations.

The success of the stage play, *The Woman in Black* is unusual in today's theatrical world. As the public turns to television, film and online entertainment, it is increasingly difficult for a theatrical production to draw the audiences needed to sustain an extended run, especially if the production does not feature dazzling special effects or multimedia. Yet, *The Woman in Black* has been able to remain an audience draw even though it is not a spectacle-filled theatre piece. The production relies, instead, on many long-standing, conventional theatrical elements; and the story, as laid out in the novel, uses many familiar Gothic tropes to create suspense and tension. The play is a wonderful example of a simple theatre piece that *works*; thus, the central questions of my investigation are: How have the Gothic tropes of Susan Hill's novel been employed to create Stephen Mallatratt's effective and frightening stage play; and how do the production's theatrical elements (particularly lighting and sound) support and enhance the formal structures designed to induce tension in an audience? It seems that audiences still like to be frightened, and somehow *The Woman in Black* has managed to consistently do just that for more than two decades. It is still scary after all these years.

The Book

Susan Hill's novel tells the story of Arthur Kipps, a young solicitor who is sent to settle the estate of Mrs Alice Drablow, a reclusive widow who has recently passed away. In order to complete his task Kipps must first travel to the small town of Crythin Gifford where he is to represent his firm at the funeral. He must also spend some time going through papers at Mrs Drablow's isolated estate, Eel Marsh House, a sinister-looking place that is situated a few miles outside the town. The sole land access to the house is via a thin causeway that is only passable during low tide. When the tide is in, the causeway is covered by water and the house is cut off from the mainland until the tide recedes. While on his assignment Kipps encounters a malicious presence that manifests in the form of a mysterious spectral figure—the woman in black. He first sees her while attending Mrs Drablow's funeral, although on this encounter he assumes that she is just a woman who is in very ill health:

> Although I did not stare, even the swift glance I took of the woman showed me enough to recognize that she was suffering from some terrible wasting disease, for not only was she extremely pale, even more than a contrast with the blackness of her garments could account for, but the skin and, it seemed, only the thinnest layer of flesh was tautly stretched and strained across her bones, so that it gleamed with a curious, blue-white sheen, and her eyes seemed sunken back into her head.[10]

After the funeral, Kipps seeks out the poor woman, but she is nowhere to be found. Later, while at Eel Marsh, Kipps once again encounters the woman in black lurking in the run-down cemetery that sits on the estate's edge. Eventually Kipps experiences many unusual and unsettling things at Eel Marsh. Strange sounds emanate from a securely locked room; a door that Kipps has been unable to budge is found standing open; an empty rocking chair inexplicably begins rocking. And most distressing of all, one day, while wandering the grounds during a thick fog he hears the horrific sound of a pony and trap falling off the causeway into the marsh. He can hear the screams of the horse and riders as they panic and momentarily fight for their lives until they are sucked into the water of the marsh and silenced by death. What disturbs Kipps most, however, is that he is certain that some of the screams are those of a young child. As the strange events multiply, Kipps becomes obsessed with trying to unravel the story of Eel Marsh House and of the woman in black. When he tries to discuss the strange events with the townspeople of Crythin Gifford, however, he finds that they are unwilling. It is only from Mrs Alice Drablow's private papers that Kipps eventually pieces together the tragedy that has seemingly brought about the haunting. Within the papers, Kipps discovers that the woman in black is the ghost of Jennet Humfrye, sister to Mrs Alice Drablow. Years earlier Humfrye had born a son out of wedlock, an untenable situation for an aristocratic young girl of those days, so she was forced to let her sister and brother-in-law adopt the boy. The Drablows would occasionally allow Humfrye to visit her son, Nathaniel, but never alone, and only under the strict edict that she not tell him who she was or that she had any relationship to him. She agreed, but the arrangement caused her terrible anguish and distress. One day when Nathaniel was six years old he was drowned in a horrible accident in which the pony and trap he was riding slid off the causeway into the marsh. Unfortunately, Humfrye was at Eel Marsh House that day and witnessed the accident from an upstairs window. From that moment on she began to slowly go mad. She never forgave the Drablows for the death of her son, and she vowed vengeance on them and on the townspeople of Crythin Gifford. Humfrye died from a horrible wasting disease twelve years later, but continued her vendetta from beyond the grave. As one of the locals tells Kipps, 'Whenever she has been seen . . . in some violent or dreadful circumstance a child has died.'[11] According to Susan Hill, the tenaciousness of Humfrye's hatred is part of what makes the novel so gripping:

> A fictional ghost has to have a raison d'etre otherwise it is pointless and a pointless ghost is the stuff of all the boring stories about veiled ladies endlessly drifting through walls and headless horsemen... for no good reason, to no purpose. My ghost cannot let go of her grief or her desire for revenge, she has to go on extracting it...[12]

Kipps eventually escapes Eel Marsh and returns home to marry his fiancée. The two have a young son, and it seems that Kipps will be able to live a happy life. That is not so, however. One afternoon while Kipps and his family are on an outing, the woman in black appears and causes a horrible accident which takes the lives of Kipps' son and his wife. The woman in black has exacted her revenge once again. Since this horrible tragedy, Kipps has remarried and has become stepfather to his new wife's children. He has almost been able to put all of the horrific events out of his mind. One Christmas Eve, however, Kipps' stepchildren are engaged in the traditional pastime of sharing ghost stories and they ask him to join in. The request resurfaces memories of his encounter with the woman in black and of all the misery she has caused:

> "I am sorry to disappoint you," I said. "But I have no story to tell!" And went quickly from the room and from the house. (...) Yes, I had a story, a true story, a story of haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy. But it was not a story to be told around the fireside on Christmas Eve.
>
> I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was now woven into my very fibers, an extricable part of my past, but I had hoped never to have to recollect it, consciously, and in full, ever again. (...)
>
> Now, tonight, it again filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. I knew that I should have no rest from it, that I should lie awake in a chill of sweat, going over that time, those events, those places. So it had been night after night for years.[13]

Kipps decides that the next day he will try to exorcise his demons once and for all by writing out the story of his time at Eel Marsh House. Perhaps then he will be able to escape the nightmares that have plagued him ever since he first encountered the woman in black those many years ago. Kipps' writing of his story becomes the narrative frame for the Gothic tale that unfolds throughout the rest of the novel.

Gothic Tropes and the Abject

So why does *The Woman in Black* resonate with readers? For one thing, it effectively employs familiar Gothic tropes and conventions that have already been embraced by fans of the genre, such as darkness, isolation, revenge, death, the afterlife, the blurring of fantasy and reality, the descent into madness. The story is set in an isolated location and filled with lush descriptions of eerie settings such as a run-down graveyard, a sinister house, a fog-choked causeway. In writing the

book, Susan Hill acknowledges that she specifically set out to create a traditional Gothic ghost story:

> I made a list of ingredients:
> 1. A ghost—not a monster or a thing from outer space but the ghost of a human who was once alive and is known to have died, but whose recognisable form re-appears or occasionally is not seen but heard, or possibly even smelled.
> 2. The Haunted House…usually isolated.
> 3. Weather…atmospheric weather conditions—fog, mist, snow, and of course moonlit darkness on clear nights.
> 4. A sceptic. A narrator or central character who begins as a sceptic or plain disbeliever and scoffer who is gradually converted by what he or she sees and experiences of ghostly presences.[14]

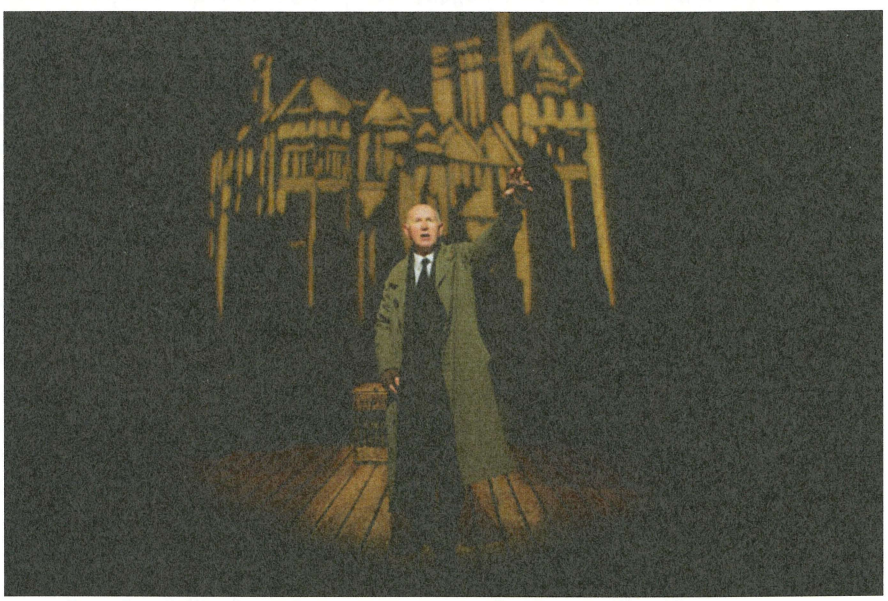

Image 2: Ken Drury as Arthur Kipps in the London stage production of *The Woman in Black.* Photo by Tristram Kenton, © 2012. Courtesy of PW Productions, London

In addition to employing these Gothic elements, Hill also conjures the genre by including references to other well-known Gothic ghost stories throughout the book. For example, one chapter is entitled 'Whistle and I'll Come to You'. This is a reference to M. R. James's short story, 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad', a piece that recounts the tale of Professor Parkins, a man who finds an ancient whistle that summons a threatening supernatural figure[15]; James's story, in turn, takes its title from a 1793 poem by Robert Burns. As Donna Cox notes, this set of nested intertextual references mirrors the nested frames that occur within Hill's novel:

> This tertiary haunting of text within text within text is analogous to the mechanics of the story with which we are presented, in which Jennet's story is contained within Kipps's narration of the ghost story which is recollectively placed within his primary narration with which the text opens. This results in a breakage of the narrative "I" which becomes dislocated in its very localized existence, tied as it is to the conventions of textual representation. "I" becomes "not-I" in this intrusion of sign systems one into the other.[16]

As Cox recognizes here, the technique of having Kipps retelling his past story in the present opens the door for the mixing of subjective and objective realities. This is a technique that is common in Gothic tales as it allows for the story to be filtered through the narrator's mind, thus adding an expressionistic element that contributes to the tension between the natural and the supernatural.[17] The storyteller functions as an unreliable narrator who may or may not be able to distinguish between their own lucid and dreaming states. Sometimes the retelling of the story is accompanied by a descent into madness which further calls truthfulness into question. This ambiguity creates a desire within the reader to unravel the mystery and arrive at some type of truth or closure. As Julia Briggs observes, it is one of the most compelling features for many readers of Gothic literature, 'The ambivalence or tension is between certainty and doubt, between the familiar and the feared, between rational occurrence and the inexplicable—and perhaps is the ghost story's chief source of power.'[18]

In addition to skilfully employing Gothic narrative techniques, *The Woman in Black* is also effective on a thematic level because it deals with loss, something everyone can relate to. Here the power of the story can be explained by looking to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. In her influential essay, 'The Powers of Horror', Kristeva explores how horror is brought about by an encounter with the abject, a concept which means something that must be expelled, thrown off, or thrust aside in order for a human being to maintain a cohesive subjectivity. Kristeva explains that we first encounter the abject at birth when are momentarily

both inside and outside of the mother's body at the same time. Prior to that moment we have literally been a part of the mother, but after birth we must abject the mother in order to form a unified, objective identity as a human being. Although we must try to push the mother away, we are also still drawn to her. Thus, we become caught in an ambiguous situation that is an integral part of the human condition. As Steven Bruhm notes in his article on the contemporary Gothic:

> We come then not to be mere victims of the last object—the mother—but active agents in the expulsion of that mother. We are creatures of conflicted desires, locked in an uncanny push-me-pull-you that propels us toward the very objects we fear and to fear the very objects toward which we are propelled. We must bond with our parents, but not too much; we must distance ourselves from our parents, but not too much.[19]

The abject confronts us with ambiguity and threatens the concepts upon which we base our identity as human beings; but our relationship with the mother is not the only situation that brings about this crisis in our lives. Confrontation with anything that causes us to question the borders that help us to organize and categorize our world brings about terror and dread. We are both repulsed and fascinated by things that represent a violation of those borders: me versus you, inside the body versus outside the body, life versus death. The object that Kristeva describes as the 'utmost of abjection', for example, is the cadaver, because it forces us to confront the borders of our own existence:

> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.[20]

It is this fascination with the abject that is at the heart of *The Woman in Black*'s popularity. The dialectic of attraction-repulsion is strongly at work in Hill's novel. In fact, it is reflected in numerous passages where Kipps describes his emotional response to seeing the woman. In one particularly pointed description he directly acknowledges that she is a liminal figure whose appearance creates psychological distress because she forces an encounter with something that lies at the border of

understanding. Although he tries to downplay the threat, Kipps is forced to admit to himself that something sinister is activated by her appearance:

> I was trying to make light of something that we both knew was gravely serious, trying to dismiss as insignificant, and perhaps even nonexistent, something that affected us both as deeply as any other experience we had undergone in our lives, for it took us to the very edge of the horizon where life and death meet together.[21]

Objects that induce terror both fascinate and repel, and this keeps audiences coming back to frightening texts. This dialectic of attraction-repulsion is at work when one reads *The Woman in Black*. The encounter with the abject is a common theme in Gothic texts because they deal with those macabre moments in life when a character is emotionally torn asunder. Through her skilful deployment of the fascination brought about by the abject, Susan Hill animates the very best of the Gothic genre and gives readers a satisfying experience, one that has made *The Woman in Black* a longstanding favourite.

The Play

While Susan Hill's novel is full of detailed descriptions of locations and characters, Stephen Mallatratt's adaptation for the stage strips the story of the realistic settings while still managing to maintain the atmospheric trappings. The stage production is a bare-bones affair featuring only two actors who recreate the story of Kipps' encounters with the woman in black in an attempt to exorcise her from his mind. This framing-device works in a similar way to that which is employed in the novel as it allows for the mixing of fantasy and reality. The conceit of the play is that Kipps has already written the story and has hired a young actor to perform it, in hopes that this performance will serve as the exorcism ritual that will allow Kipps to purge his painful memories. Thus, the actor whom Kipps has hired ends up representing Kipps in the play-within-a-play, while Kipps portrays all of the other characters in his own story. The two men reenact the tale using only a minimum of props. The stage is almost bare except for a door frame and a few items that appear to be properties from previous productions. An upstage area that is separated from the audience by a gauzy scrim also contains what, at first, appears to be theatrical clutter. With strategic lighting, however, this cluttered area transforms into a graveyard and a nursery as the play progresses. Because the visual elements of the production are sparse, the play relies heavily upon the actors' abilities to tell a powerful story. It is reminiscent of a ghost story told around the fire.

The original production in Scarborough was commissioned and directed by Robin Herford, who then took the show to London and has directed every West

End cast since. Herford makes effective use of the simple theatrical conventions written into Mallatratt's script. He finds the storytelling aspect to be one of the things that gives the piece its power,

> I really believe in this show. I think it tells us something very profound about theatre. . . . We've got a couple of chairs, a skip, and two actors, and a coat rack of costumes. And we tell a story. And the power of the story, the power of dramatic narrative, and the excitement that is generated by actors becoming other people, that's another form of magic [22]

Catalin Ghita, in his explication of Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina*, contained in this volume, echoes the sentiment that *less is more* when it comes to creating a frightening narrative:

> It is my opinion that, in order for a narrative to appear terrifying, its atmosphere should exude danger by making use of a minimum of external ingredients, this representing, if you will, a sort of an Occam's razor applied to fantastic literature.[23]

My experience of reading the novel and of seeing two stage productions of *The Woman in Black* supports his theory.

In addition to enhancing the storytelling aspect of the play, the sparse stage also allows the production team to carefully direct the audience's focus. Subtle changes in light and shadow can be controlled so that what is concealed can be revealed at precisely the right moment. By carefully controlling what is veiled or unveiled, the visual design of the production sustains a feeling of dread within the audience. In the script, Stephen Mallatratt's 'Adaptor's Note' directly addresses the importance of this visual control, 'Darkness is a powerful ally of terror, something glimpsed in a corner is far more frightening than if it's fully observed. Sets work best when they accommodate this—when things unknown might be in places unseen.'[24] In his production, Herford has made good use of the audience environment as well. From the beginning of the show, some characters appear at the back of the auditorium 'leaving the audience constantly feeling something could creep up on them.'[25] Sound effects emanate from multiple places throughout the theatre, and Herford even manipulates the temperature in order to help unsettle audience members from the moment they arrive, 'I try to preserve a sense of discomfort. . . .There's no music playing, and I try to keep the air conditioning cooler than might be comfortable. The audience is slightly keyed-up.'[26]

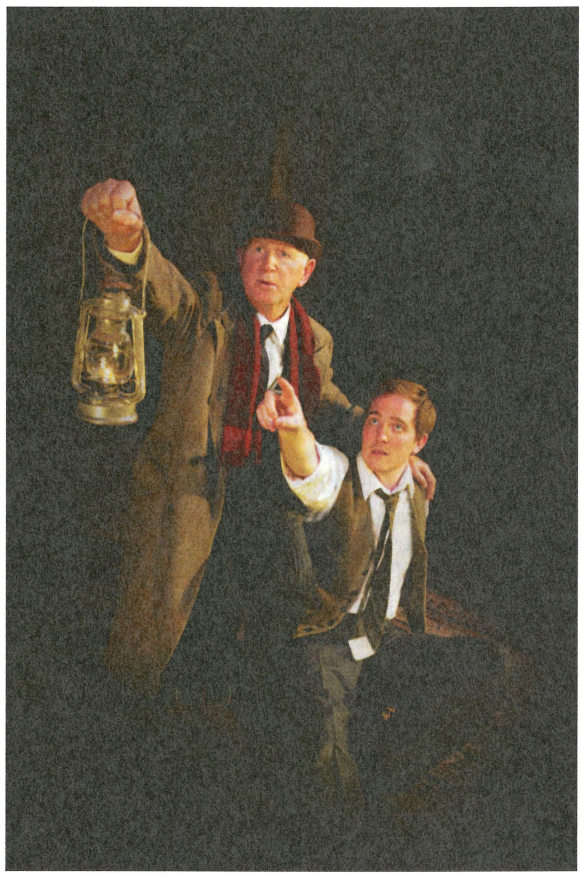

Image 3: Ken Drury and Adam Best in the London stage production of *The Woman in Black.* Photo by Tristram Kenton, © 2012. Courtesy of PW Productions, London

An effective, atmospheric sound design, complete with wind, tolling bells, the jangling and squeaking of the pony and trap, and the bump-bump-pause of a rocking chair, helps audience members to imagine the various settings of the story and also helps to draw them into the environment. The sound design also occasionally jars the audience with loud noises, thus activating a startle response. In one particularly bloodcurdling moment, for example, loud screams simultaneously emanate from everywhere in the theatre, including the back of the house, the balcony, and the aisles. In this instance the play works on an aversive reflex level because these sounds directly engage the autonomic nervous system to

create a fight-or-flight response. Another terrifying moment occurs when a door that the actors have been unable to budge suddenly flies open of its own accord. This was entirely the idea of director Herford. In Mallatratt's script it calls for the door to open slowly,[27] but by having the door fly open Herford has added another wonderful startle moment that very effectively scares the audience. Company Stage Manager, Jon Huyton, also notes that, because it is live theatre, sometimes the sound design inadvertently gives the actors a fright as well, 'We've had screams go off in the wrong place. That's one to test the boys on stage, because everyone in the audience reacts.'[28]

Using the startle effect alone, however, is not enough to sustain a popular and long-running production. Many frightening entertainments, especially films, have relied too heavily on making an audience jump and have been denigrated for it. In order to attain a truly popular production that receives not only great word-of-mouth, but also repeat attendance and critical praise, a play must have more going for it than *jump scares*; and *The Woman in Black* certainly does. In addition to creating some great scary moments, the stage adaptation of *The Woman in Black* also works on an intellectual and emotional level because it presents the audience with an intriguing puzzle to solve, and because it contains sympathetic, complex characters. Audience members are drawn into the story and are able to empathize with Kipps' horrible situation, and even the character of Jennet Humfrye can elicit some sympathy. Although she causes the torment and suffering of innocent people, one can still see that her actions were originally motivated by deep grief and sorrow. *The Woman in Black* is not just a scary story; it is also a story that deals with obligation, love, loneliness, and despair. As Susanna Clapp observes, 'Like all really good ghost stories *The Woman in Black* is grounded not in horror but in human pain and loss.'[29]

Both the novel and the play use the technique of narrative framing to blur the subjective and the objective, thus allowing for each to have a twist ending. The twists of the two texts are very different, however. In the novel we learn that the woman in black did indeed exact her revenge on Arthur Kipps years after he returned home by causing the death of his wife and infant son; in the play Mallatratt gives us a different turn. While Hill's frame confines the woman's appearances to the past, in the stage version the woman's manifestations are moved into the present, as she does indeed make several appearances during the production, despite the fact that she does not appear in the cast list. This conceit allows Mallatratt to set up the clever twist ending that only works in the stage version of the story. Throughout the play the young actor portraying Kipps sees the woman in black and assumes that she is a performer whom the *real* Kipps has brought in to enhance the production. It is not until the very end of the piece that it is revealed that throughout the entire play the woman has only been seen by the young actor. The real Arthur Kipps has seen no woman. This implies that throughout the evening the woman in black has been exacting her revenge upon the

young performer and, since we too have seen her, she has simultaneously been exacting it upon us. The young actor is cursed and so are we. He has seen the woman in black so his new-born son is now doomed. We have seen the woman in black, so perhaps our children are as well.

Not including the performer who plays the woman in black in the cast list allows for her appearance to truly surprise the audience. It also conflates the spectral character in the play with an actual spectre that is haunting the theatre. The audience sees a person who, according to the established conventions of the theatre, should not appear in the production. By employing this convention, Stephen Mallatratt makes wonderful use of the unique possibilities that only live theatre can provide. His surprise ending is entirely different than that of the novel, and entirely dependent upon the real-time performance of a play. Mallatratt has managed to craft an alternate ending for Hill's novel, one that is just as surprising and works just as well as the original. The idea for this twist did not occur to Mallatratt right away, however. He first considered sticking to Hill's storyline. Then he realized the possibilities opened up by the immediacy and presence of live theatre:

> I remember that the idea of the ghost not being seen by the genuine Mr Kipps grew gradually. At first she was going to be another actor—they were going to give her directions on where to move and so on. Then I realized that the best way to do it is for her to appear by magic and not be seen by the older Mr Kipps.[30]

The brilliance of Mallatratt's adaptation has been praised by audience members and critics alike. His vision and sensitivity for the workings of live theatre allowed him to create a script that became the basis for a truly unique theatre experience; as Marty Mulrooney notes in his review of the production:

> The character of The Actor and the idea of the events presented as a rehearsed play is a masterstroke of adaptation that drags the audience straight into a tragic tale of loss, revenge and horror. If adapted directly from the book I firmly believe it would lose much of its impact and appeal; the changes Mr Mallatratt implements are inspired and work perfectly on stage.[31]

Unfortunately, Stephen Mallatratt passed away in 2004 at the age of fifty-seven, from leukemia. His legacy and theatrical brilliance live on, however, night after night at the Fortune Theatre. Even Susan Hill herself has a deep appreciation for Mallatratt's contribution to *The Woman in Black*'s stage success:

> The play of my ghost novel *The Woman in Black* owes everything to Stephen. He read it, saw how it could be adapted, and did so brilliantly . . . and the rest is theatre history.[32]

Conclusion

The combination of the effective use of Gothic tropes, the foregrounding of the attraction/repulsion element elucidated by Kristeva's notion of the abject and the simple theatricality and cleverness of Stephen Mallatratt's stage adaptation, have made the West End production of *The Woman in Black* a favorite among theatregoers for more than two decades. The play has garnered great reviews from not only the professional critics, but from a wide array of fans. In *Front Row,* for example, noted author Beryl Bainbridge recounts an after-show incident that reveals how word of mouth has helped to spur the play's reputation, 'I came home in a taxi driven by a chap who had already seen the play. He'd enjoyed it so much he'd recommended it to his parents and then his in-laws.'[33]

Susan Hill's clever story still continues to fascinate. In 2012 a new film version was released by CBS Films starring Daniel Radcliffe, and the West End production continues to pull in audiences. *The Woman in Black* is a simple, effective novel that presents the best a Gothic story has to offer, and it has been transformed into an outstanding play which proves that some good, old-fashioned storytelling, coupled with the judicious use of theatrical effects can still have popular appeal. And, of course, the fact that the play is downright scary does not hurt either. As Charles Spencer, the theatre critic for London's *Daily Telegraph* says, *The Woman in Black* is 'one of the most brilliantly effective spine-chillers you will ever encounter.'[34]

Notes

[1] 'Testimonials,' *The Woman in Black* web site, Viewed 13 February 2013, http://www.thewomaninblack.com/news/reviews.

[2] Julia Kristeva, 'Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,' in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 232.

[3] The record for the longest running play is firmly held by Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* which has been playing on the West End continuously since 1952.

[4] Mark Palmer, ed., *The Woman in Black: Education Pack*, thewomaninblack.com, Viewed 15 March 2012, http://www.thewomaninblack.com/connectwp/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/06/wib_pack.pdf.

[5] 'Testimonials,' *The Woman in Black* web site, Viewed 13 February, 2013, http://www.thewomaninblack.com/news/reviews/.

[6] Alan Woods, 'Emphasizing the Avant-Garde: An Exploration in Theatre Historiography,' in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 166.
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